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A Woman Apostle

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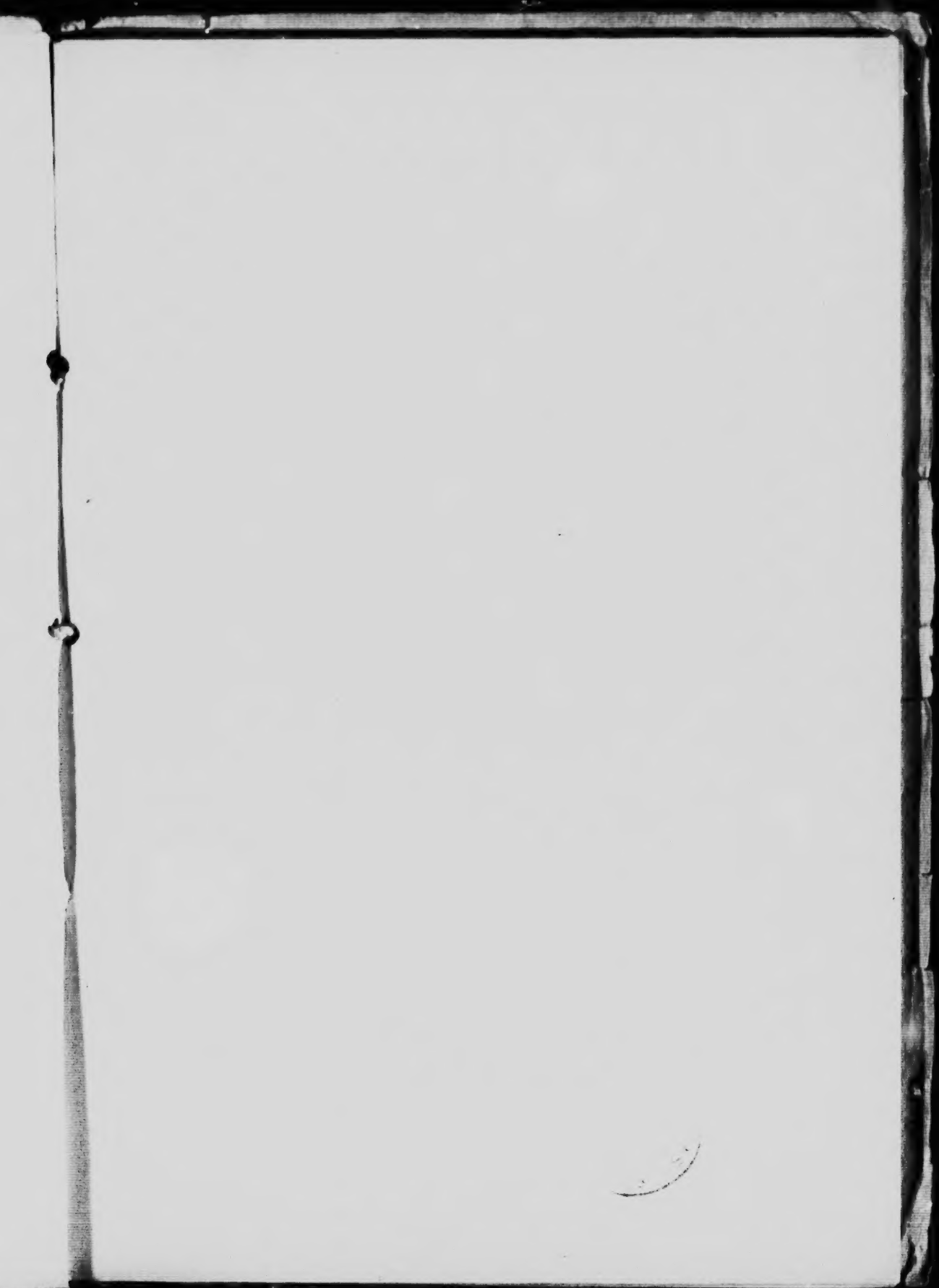
Respectfully dedicated

To the

Very Reverend MOTHER MARIE ST. HONORINE

6th Superior General of the Congregation.

Newton Abbot, England.
6 May, 1922.





MO-Cep.

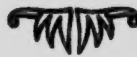
A WOMAN APOSTLE

THE VENERABLE MOTHER
ANNE-MARIE RIVIER

FOUNDRESS OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE
PRESENTATION OF THE BLESSED
VIRGIN MARY



1768-1838



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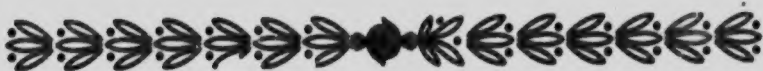
We hereby declare that we humbly submit to the decrees of Pope Urban VIII, and intend in no way to prevent the judgment of the Holy See, in publishing this short biography of the Venerable Marie Rivier.

IMPRIMATUR :

Sancti Hyacinthi, 3 Martii, 1913.

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I.

Our Lady's Privileged Child.

ON December 19th, 1768, Anne-Marie Rivier was born at Montpezat, one of the picturesque villages scattered among the volcanic peaks of the Cevennes, on the right bank of the Rhone.

Her life, says her first biographer, F. Hamon, is but the history of her devotion to Our Blessed Lady, or rather, the history of an uninterrupted exchange of filial confidence and supernatural favours, of unceasing prayers and benefits conferred in response to them.

That simple trust in the Queen of Heaven developed spontaneously in little Marie's soul with her first experience of suffering. And physical pain awaited the privileged child at the very threshold of life.

Anne-Marie had been baptized on December 20th, her grandmother standing as sponsor. She was the third of a family of four children. Her father, John Rivier was then carrying on a trade in Languedoc wines. The Rivier family, "la fleur des honnêtes gens," was one of the most respected in the country. Their modest home, which still exists, had near it a little church dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows. At the back was a large orchard, and a terrace or sheltered square. This was the children's playground.

Marie Rivier was at first a healthy and vigorous child ; but at the age of sixteen months, when she was already able to walk alone, an accident occurred which deprived her of the use of her legs, in addition to causing her other serious injuries. She had fallen from her bed, and from that day had suffered pain so severe that her life was despaired of. All efforts to remedy the evil proved useless. Crutches made for her later on were of little or no avail. Her good mother was heart-broken at the sight of the helpless child.

But the frail condition of her body never seemed to affect the girl's mental or intellectual development. Neither constant pain nor enforced solitude could alter her disposition ; and although Marie was growing up a cripple, she was lively and energetic.

In her grief Madame Rivier turned towards Heaven in prayer. The pious mother, carrying her ailing child in her arms, used to repair frequently to the little church of Our Lady of Sorrows to weep and pray. At the sight of the statue of Our Lady holding the lifeless body of her divine Son on her lap, and her own mother praying prostrate before the altar, Marie Rivier — she revealed it later on — was penetrated with a deep consciousness of Our Blessed Lady's great power of intercession. This pious intuition led her to beg daily to be carried again to the little church. Her wish was complied with. Every morning Marie would be taken to the church, and seated behind the altar at the very foot of the statue. And there, whole hours were spent by the child in sweet colloquies with her Heavenly Mother. "Good Lady," she would say, "you can cure me if you will ! Do say that you will ! Do, cure me !" — "Holy Virgin, how very poor you look ! You have no hat on and your dress is so shabby ! If only you will cure me, I'll tell my mother to buy you a good dress and a pretty hat.... I'll bring you flowers and make a wreath

to put on your head. . . . I know that you love little children ; well, I'll bring them over here. . . ." Then, after a pause : " If you don't want to cure me I am going to sulk. . . ." And instantly carrying out her childish threat, Marie would hide her face in her hands for a while — and then, resume her daily prayer.

The pilgrimages and prayers to Our Lady of Sorrows never ceased for four years ! On September 8th, the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, little Marie asked for her crutches and, for the first time, succeeded in walking with them. Madame Rivier, in grateful acknowledgement of this favour, vowed that her daughter should wear Our Lady's colours for one year and, in consequence, got her a blue dress and hat. On the following morning both articles were found missing : the child had taken them to the church. The hat was on Our Lady's head, and the dress on her shoulder — for Marie had vainly tried to put it on properly.

Three years later, Madame Rivier, now a widowed mother, had the consolation of seeing the miraculous cure completed. It was on August 15th, 1777, the feast of the Assumption of Our Blessed Lady. Anne-Marie rose and walked as though she had never been a cripple. No trace of her former lameness or deformity was left behind. She was nine years old. In thankfulness for the miracle, she resolved to quit her home secretly and find some wilderness where she could live a life of prayer and penance. One morning, an acquaintance of the Rivier family met little Marie alone on the highroad, making her way from Montpezat. In her surprise she asked the child : " Where can you be going, Marie ? " — " To the desert," was the reply. " Why ? " — " To pray." The child was quickly brought back to her anxious mother and made to understand that she must give up, for the time, her project of living the life of a hermit.

She thought, however, something ought to be done to testify her gratitude to Our Lady. She remembered a promise she had made : " I will bring little children to you." — Since she could not become a hermit, she would be an apostle. There were several children in the neighbourhood who enjoyed playing with her. She used to direct their games and settle their childish quarrels ; they had already nicknamed her " La petite Mère." Many a time, before she could walk, when seated on the terrace or in the orchard, she would group them around her invalid chair to teach them prayers or the catechism. They enjoyed her stories about the Lives of the Saints. Now that she was cured, she would take them with her to the little church. There, in honour of Our Lady, she organized processions, childish functions and performances in which the heavenly spirits must have taken part, mingling unseen with the innocent children of this world.

Another trait in the saintly Foundress also manifested itself at the same time ; it was her affection for the poor for whom she would deprive herself of everything. When she had nothing left to give away, she used to bring them to her ever-generous mother. One day, leading by the hand a blind old woman who had been made an object of ridicule by the other children, she led her through the streets of Montpezat collecting alms for her.

After her First Communion, Marie, with her eldest sister, was sent as a boarder to the convent of Notre-Dame de Pradelles. She was now twelve years old. Her small stature, at first, made her an object of unpleasant jokes on the part of her new associates. But there, too, the holy child's early maturity, and her wonderful power over others, soon raised her above her companions. She was entrusted with the duty of assisting in the preparation of other children for their First Communion. Her merry heart attracted the younger ones

among the boarders, while she led on those who were older to the practice of mental prayer and the conquest of self. The whole school soon felt the benefit of Anne-Marie's presence. Speaking of those years, she said later on : " As I was the smallest girl there, I endeavoured to make myself, as it were, the servant of all ; trying to help and oblige them, yielding to them whenever I felt I could do so." And, referring to the struggle she had had against self-will and her nervous sensitiveness, she adds : " Whenever I was conscious of any inclination to remissness, I used to crush it at once."

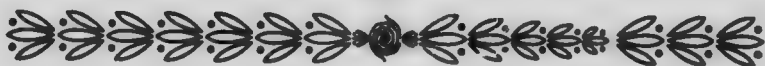
Anne-Marie then begged to be admitted as a postulant, but the nuns thinking her too delicate to follow the Rules, refused to accept her in the Novitiate. " Well," said Anne-Marie prophetically, " Since I am not wanted here, I must found a convent for myself."





Du jeune jésuiste on m'a dit
 ou travailler après conversion je m'en
 chère et d'engager de même
 mon cœur ou ne rien faire et à quel point
 est-ce possible

Je suis avec vous Maria



II.

The Smiles of Our Lady.

THOUGH she little suspected the views of Providence concerning her, Marie Rivier had hardly returned home when she mentioned her intention of opening a school. Her first attempts met with severe criticism and mistrust. But she stood firm, bravely facing every difficulty. After earnest prayers, she found rooms in a building belonging to the Tertiaries of St. Dominic, and the school was opened. On the very first day, the school room was filled with children. Mothers would bring their little ones to the young mistress whose uncommon tact, piety and wisdom had soon become apparent to all.

Mis^s Rivier, thanking God for the happy turn of the tide, endeavoured to sow among her young flock the seeds of Christian virtues. She would daily speak to her little ones of the Passion of Our Lord. Our Blessed Lady's name seems to have been constantly on her lips. And the sweet Mother of Christ was pleased to bless and reward her servant's zeal by a miracle which occurred several times.

Near the class-room, in a small oratory, there was an old statue of Our Blessed Lady. The expression of the face was grave and sad. Here, the young mistress loved to kneel in prayer, surrounded by her school children. "If you pray

well," she said one day to them, "Our Blessed Lady is sure to look down upon you smilingly." All eyes were fixed on the statue, while hands were clasped in prayer. But soon, a number of voices broke out exclaiming joyfully : "Look, look, she is smiling now." All present saw the miraculous smiles, as was attested later on by several persons who survived the Venerable Mother ; and Marie Rivier herself exclaimed after the little ones : "See Our Blessed Lady smiling !"

The girl-apostle, apart from her school duties, found time for more work. The Tertiaries of St. Dominic and St. Francis entrusted to her the training of their aspirants. She visited the poor and worked for their comfort. With the help of another pious woman, she started a guild for the protection of young girls, and spared nothing to make their meetings attractive and useful. Soon, catholic mothers begged her to hold meetings for them as well. And every Sunday, Marie Rivier instructed and entertained them, teaching them to love and serve our good God. The parish priest asked Miss Rivier to prepare the boys of his Congregation for their first Communion. She accepted all without counting the cost and found time for every duty. Later on she used to love to recall the instructions she had given to those boys who, by that time, had become grown up men and good Christians.

In January 1792, a new mission called for the zeal of the servant of God. The French Revolution had already worked havoc among the villagers and country-folk in the Department of Ardèche. The parish of Moirpezat was sadly deserted by its pastor, who had taken the revolutionary oath ; and Marie Rivier, with the deepest grief, felt it her duty to rise to the occasion, and make up by more zealous efforts for the spiritual loss sustained around her. She offered the use of her school on Sundays, for public prayers ; and here, she herself

would read aloud the Ordinary of the Mass, the Psalms for Vespers, and end the meeting by earnestly exhorting her hearers to remain faithful and have confidence in God.

The revolutionary authorities soon sent an order forbidding her to hold any more meetings. She merely changed the hour and places. An old solitary barn was now chosen, and several times Miss Rivier had the consolation and privilege of bringing there, from their hiding-places, some of the faithful priests, in order to have the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered. This had to be done on dark nights, or during a storm ; and great caution was necessary in order to avoid revolutionary agents. Many priests who had courageously refused to take the Convention oath remained hidden in the neighbourhood ; Miss Rivier knew the hiding-places of several of them, and at the risk of her own life, contrived to bring some of the faithful priests to the bedside of the dying.

In 1793, Anne-Marie's mother went to her reward fortified by the rites of the church. Her zealous daughter had succeeded in bringing a priest to her dear dying mother. It was a sad bereavement for Miss Rivier ; and yet, this loss proved to be only the first of a series of fresh crosses and contradictions.

Towards the end of 1793, there were very few churches in France still remaining open. Religious Orders had been dispersed, and convent grounds and buildings sold as national property. Miss Rivier's school-house met with the same fate ; it was sold and her scholars dispersed. What was she to do now ? In her bitter sorrow she again turned to the miraculous image of Our Lady, and once more another smile of the Blessed Virgin answered her prayer, and strengthened the disconsolate servant of God.

Then, distributing among the poor what her mother had left her, poor herself like the first Apostles of Christ, she went to Thueyts, a small town a few miles from Montpezat, where, at the invitation of some Catholic families, she intended to open another school.



Bishop d'Aviau.
 Abbe Pontanier. — Abbe Vernet, Vicar-general.
 The convent of Thuevts
 Our Lady of Sorrows. — The statue which was seen smiling
 The first orphan girls adopted by the Ven. Mother



III.

The Congregation of the Presentation of Our Lady.

THE first attempts of Miss Rivier at Thueyts met with severe opposition but, like those at Montpezat, they were soon followed by an entire change of public opinion. Before long Miss Rivier saw herself surrounded by the children of the peasantry, those of the Count of Blou, and the daughters of even some of the most ardent revolutionists. The parish was without a priest; but, as the church had not been officially closed, Miss Rivier used to invite the Congregation to assemble there, while she recited the rosary and gave Catechism instructions. Crowds soon followed her to listen to her simple, comforting instructions; and people often left the church exclaiming: "The Holy Ghost speaks to us through her mouth!" Anne-Marie Rivier also visited the neighbouring villages, proclaiming every where the Word of God. Where she found churches closed, she would address the people in the open fields, and pray with them for her desolate country.

About this time, a holy priest, Abbé Pontanier, a Sulpician who was in hiding at Thueyts, encouraged the girl-apostle and approved of her taking a few pious women to live with her and share her work of zeal and charity. Marie Rivier and her early companions, little heeding the accusations of rashness and imprudence which they heard around them,

went on their humble way doing good, faithful to the inspiration of God. On November 21st, 1796, after Mass had been offered by Abbé Pontanier in the school-house garret, they vowed to devote their lives to educational and charitable work under the protection of the Mother of God. The Presentation of Our Lady was chosen as a patronal feast ; and, after the religious ceremony was over, Abbé Pontanier brought to the new superior of the infant congregation the monogram of Our Lady, as the distinctive badge and seal of her house.

Such was the birthday of the Congregation of the Religious of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Privations, humiliations, poverty were the foundation-stones of the rising community. Marie Rivier's early companions had to fetch wood on their shoulders for their kitchen fire, to bake their own bread — when they could afford to buy the flour ; and many a day they had to go without sufficient food, to allow the boarders to be properly fed. Such examples of self-denial attracted to them a virtuous lady teacher who had belonged to a convent now dispersed by the Revolution.

A few months later, Miss Rivier found that a more suitable building must be procured, both for the school and the convent. Ten novices had already gathered around her. She prayed as usual, and Our Lady answered her prayer. On November 21st, 1797, in the chapel of a new house bought for the purpose, Miss Rivier and her companions vowed obedience to the Rules of her convent drawn up by Abbé Pontanier.

While some of the daughters were busied chiefly with school-work, others dispersed among the neighbouring hamlets to teach the catechism, to help the poor and the sick ; and to make up, as far as lay in their power, for the absence of priests.

But, in February 1799, the civil authorities of Ardèche

ordered that the community of the convent of Thueyts should be dispersed. Captain Henry, with one hundred armed men, marched from Privas to Thueyts to carry out the orders of the Commune. But his force met with a most vigorous resistance from the people of Thueyts. He had to return to Privas with his revolutionary mission unfulfilled.

In the pantry of the convent, at Thueyts, a small cupboard is still shown where the Blessed Sacrament was kept during those days of Terror. The cupboard had a secret opening outside the house through which the ciborium could, in case of violence, be carried away safely from the convent.

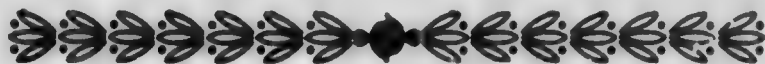
Abbé Vernet, another Sulpician, was at this time acting as Vicar-General for the Diocese of Viviers, though obliged to hide his perilous office by disguising himself as a military officer. He came across the servant of God and soon understood her apostolic soul. He undertook the spiritual guidance of Madame Rivier, and succeeded in spending ten days at Thueyts in June 1801, devoting his time to the study of the Rules of the new convent. In August of the same year he came again, even bringing with him Archbishop d'Aviau. Five novices were professed on this occasion ; the Archbishop approved the Rules and went away saying : " This is the work of the Holy Ghost."

One week later, August 15th 1801, Pope Pius VII accepted the Concordat, and thus ended the religious persecution in France.





St Hyacinth, Canada. — The Noviciate France
 The very Rev. Mother St Maurice.
 Foundress of the Canadian missions
 The Holy Family
 Life-size group at the Convent of Bourg St And  ol
 The Ven. Mother's room. Her tombstone at the chapel door



IV.

Providential Vocations.

TO pray, to work and keep silent," was the motto given by the Ven. Mother to her daughters in order to enable them to pass unmolested through the troubled times of the persecution. Scattered among the villages of Ardèche to instruct and evangelise the peasants, the first spiritual daughters of Madame Rivier seemed, by their prayers, good works and silent humility, to have possessed a wonderful power of attracting to their Congregation all those with whom they came in contact. A young lady from Lyons, Miss Lesne, known later on as Sister Gertrude, applied for admission among the novices. "You will have to live on scanty fare," said a gentleman from Thueyts who knew of the Sisters' poverty. But Miss Lesne, a daughter of a martyr of the Commune, was not to be frightened by the prospect of a life of privations. Her mother soon after followed her, and became Sister Madeleine.

Mrs. Berthelin, a professor of languages at Nantes, when on her way to the theatre one night, happened to enter a church ; and here God touched her heart with His grace inspiring her to give up the world and enter the newly founded convent. She became Sister Chantal.

On the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lady, 1801, Miss Millot, the daughter of the Seigneur de Vernoux, and the

two Misses Pervencher, her friends, vowed to devote their lives to God in the convent of the Presentation of Our Lady.

In 1805, Madame Rivier had opened twenty houses where her daughters were working with a zeal modelled on her own to repair the sad ruins wrought by the Revolution and re-establish catholic practices. Parish priests were anxious to secure the help of her assistants. Madame Rivier had been endowed by Heaven with special gifts for the evangelisation of the poor. Filled with missionary zeal, when going round to visit the houses of her spiritual daughters, she would deliver instructions and pious exhortations before crowds assembled to hear the word of God from her mouth. At Largentière, Le Puy, Pont-St-Esprit, Villeneuve de Berg, and wherever she was expected to address the people, rooms were filled long before the hour of meeting, many coming from neighbouring towns to hear the Servant of God. All classes of persons were seen mixed together. Madame Rivier's words, now spirited and captivating, now grave and reproofing, would find their way to the hearts of her hearers, there to bring forth the fruits of salvation. After those instructions, sinners, moved to repentance, repaired straight to the tribunal of Penance, and many religious vocations enabled the saintly Foundress to carry out on a larger scale her apostolic work.

The many marvellous conversions which resulted from her exhortations were won by constant prayer and entire self-abnegation. Physical pain, contradictions, interior desolation were her daily lot. "La croix est mon pain de chaque jour," she wrote to one of her spiritual daughters, "but were God to say to me 'Behold, you may now choose between heaven or a state of crucifixion to last till the end of the world,' I should never hesitate a moment, but should choose to remain as I am, for the sake of winning souls to God."



V.

The Spirit of the Order.

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I N 1805, Pope Pius VII, when crossing France on his way back to Rome, blessed and encouraged the new Order. On November 21st, 1807, the Sisters adopted the religious habit which they are now wearing. Owing to the troubled times, it had been deemed more prudent up to that date, to work in a secular dress. The organisation and government of the Congregation were definitely settled. Among the patron saints chosen by the Venerable Mother and her Council, as models and protectors of her community, St. Francis Regis, the apostle of Vivarais, ranks next to Our Blessed Lady. She wishes her daughters ever to remember that, in order to work efficaciously for the sanctification of others, they must first attend to their own spiritual perfection. One day, when praying, in the sanctuary of Notre-Dame du Puy, she heard the following words from Our Blessed Lady: "Lead thy daughters through humility." Humility, zeal for God's glory and charity must be their distinctive characteristics. "I want no other Paradise than that of winning souls for God," she would say. "Never mind the difficulties you meet with when instructing children ; I would willingly go and teach the devils if there was any chance of converting them."

The boarding-school attached to the mother-house was at all times, the object of her fond maternal solicitude. She

knew each and all of its inmates, and it was one of the consolations of her apostleship to cultivate among them all christian virtues as well as many religious vocations.

Side by side with the boarding-school, an orphanage wholly supported by the convent, was one of the foundations dear to her motherly heart. Whenever an important favour had to be obtained, the Ven. Mother would adopt one more orphan girl. As many as one hundred and fifty homeless children were sheltered by "The Mother of the Poor." People were tempted to find her charities excessive. "Let us trust in the Providence of God," she would answer, "when he sends us his needy children, he can and will provide for their wants."

The Sister entrusted with the daily distribution of alms was seen giving away some garment that the Venerable Foundress thought unsuitable. "Go and fetch something better," said the motherly superior; "I should feel too ashamed if, at the judgment day, Our Lord was to bring out that ragged stuff."

One day, Sister Louise, who was in charge of the oil cistern, went to tell her good superior that the stock was exhausted. The cistern had even been scalded and cleaned ready to receive a new store. But there was no money in the convent to buy the oil. "Go back to the cellar," simply answered Madame Rivier; "you will find there is some oil left." Saying this, the holy foundress had lifted her eyes towards a statue of Our Blessed Lady on her desk. Sister Louise went to the cellar as directed, and found the great stone cistern brimful of oil! She and her helper in the office went back to the superior's room to tell her of the miracle. The Venerable Mother calmly replied: "You see that Divine Providence protects us."

During the hard winter of 1811, a famine spread desolation in the Cevennes. The Ven. Mother gave orders that

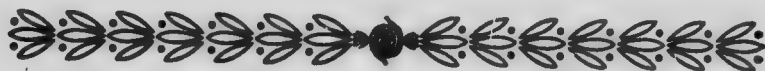


food and clothes should be distributed to all those in need who begged at the convent door. One day, the Sister in charge went in great trouble to the Superior's room, to tell her that there was no flour left in the house to make bread for the following day. The servant of God answered by ordering that warm clothing should be made and distributed among her twenty-one dear orphans. The Sister thought her good mother had not understood, and repeated her anxious request. "Almighty God can provide flour, and all else, for us," was the only reply. Moved by a secret impulse, the Sister returned to the corn-bin which she had just left empty, and found enough wheat in it for the bread needed for the following day. More wheat was taken daily, and the miraculous multiplication lasted as long as the famine itself — the whole winter. That wooden box, or trough, is still preserved in the convent of Thueyts.





The high-Altar at Bourg St. And  ol  
 Altar of the Sacred Heart. - The Nuns choir.  
 Front view of the present Mother-House.  
 Main entrance. — The Cloister



## VI.

### **Bourg St. Andéol.**

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**I**N 1815, the spread of the Institute, and the growing number of its members, necessitated the acquisition of larger buildings for a mother-house. Besides the Diocese of Viviers, the Sisters had now been called to those of Mende, Nîmes and Avignon. "My children," the good mother had prophetically said, addressing the community in 1813; "This house of Thueyts is too small; but six years hence we shall have another one. I know not where, but you will see it."

That spot was Bourg St. Andéol, on the right bank of the Rhone — once a camp where Caesar and his army, on their way to Great Britain, are said to have offered sacrifices to the heathen God Mitras; a spot hallowed later on by the martyrdom of St. Andéol, its patron saint; now, a quiet town with a population of about 5,000. A large building, which, before the Revolution had been a convent of the Order of the Visitation, was now on sale. The Venerable Mother and her Council, judging the building suitable for her purpose, purchased it in 1815. Four years were spent in enlarging and repairing the former monastery. Those were four years of incessant prayer and almost incredible activity on the part of the saintly Foundress. There, too, she displayed her wonted trust in Divine Providence and received most touching proofs of the protection of Our Blessed Lady.

To those who wondered how she would meet the expenses of the purchase and repairs of the convent, she replied : " As I have nothing, only 4,000 francs, (= £160) I tell you, God will give all. Had I more money, I think I should never dare undertake what I am doing." — In fact, the regular weekly payment of the workmen's wages was in itself a wonderful answer to the unlimited faith and confidence of the Venerable Mother. The pecuniary resources required never failed, and came, at times, from quarters where they had been least expected.

It was Our Lady's own house, as the saintly superior would call it. The very stones of it should be dedicated to her.

One day, during the repairs, a fire broke out which threatened to ruin the whole edifice. The Ven. Mother, surrounded by several Sisters, prayed calmly and trustingly, and the threatening flames were suddenly extinguished.

She was most careful, when dealing with the architects, to preserve the strictest simplicity of style, while showing a wonderful insight as to the future needs of each department of the convent. Visitors crossing the main cloister on the ground floor, may notice that the flagstones which are of various tints, are placed pell-mell without any attempt at design. One day, during the progress of the building, the Mother Superior had noticed the workmen arranging them symmetrically, for the sake of effect. She thought it not in accordance with religious simplicity, and gave orders to have the stones removed, and placed as they are seen to-day. " When my daughters come into this house," she said, " they must not be made to feel that they enter a palace."

Here again, the wonderful success achieved by the Ven. Foundress was purchased at the cost of many painful crosses. In one year, 1818, she lost six of her sisters by death. The

following year, Sr. Martine, the Ven. Mother's first companion, and Sr. Chantal, her first assistant, fell the victims of an epidemic of the typhus. The latter had contracted the illness while devotedly attending a poor woman who refused to see the priest, and whom the holy Sister, at last, had the consolation of bringing back to God.

Then the indefatigable Mother herself was taken dangerously ill. When she understood that her state, humanly speaking, was hopeless, she only said: "Must I die in a bed? How hard this is to me!"

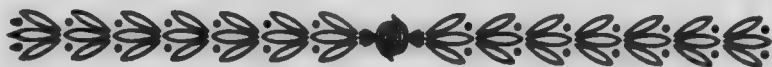
The Sisters, however, by prayer and sacrifice obtained the cure of their good Mother. On the last day of a novena to St. Peter of Alcantara, their trust in God had its reward, and the Ven. Mother was again instantaneously cured.

On the 16th of June, 1820, the Feast of St. Francis Regis, the new convent was blessed and opened by Mgr de Mons, Bishop of Viviers and Mende.

With its outbuildings and spacious grounds, it offers distinct and separate accommodation for the administrative portion of the Community, the Infirmary, the Novitiate, an Orphanage and a Boarding-School. Statues of Our Blessed Mother are to be seen every where: at the main entrance, in the long cloisters, the gardens, on the boarder's terrace, the boundary wall along the Rhone. Sailors often hail Our Lady as they pass. And it was the wish of the Holy Foundress that it should be so, as a testimony that Our Blessed Lady was the Mother and Superior of her new convent.







## VII.

### Inner life of the Woman-Apostle.

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THE Venerable Foundress lived eighteen years after the translation of her convent from Thueyts to Bourg St. Andéol. Her hunger and thirst for the salvation of souls only seemed to increase with the increase of means to help and save them. Her grief when she heard of any offence to God was, as she herself used to say, her only real sorrow.

One day, she was told that a carnival feast, usually an occasion of scandal and sin, was being organised at Bourg St. Andéol. As she heard the music in the street calling the people to revelry, she rang the convent bell for a special meeting of her Community. "My dear children," she said to the assembled Sisters, "the devil is calling his meeting, and so I have called mine." Then followed words of warm exhortation to prayer and self-denial, in order to atone for the sins likely to be committed on that day.

"There is so much we could do to promote God's glory!" she would say. "Why have I not many more Sisters to send and do His work?" — "We should love God, not only for ourselves, but for others — as though each of us had not one heart only, but twelve hearts..." — "Either the service of Jesus-Christ, or death; either labour to make Jesus-Christ known and bring souls to him, or death; either our schools

and the salvation of children, or death..." "All for God and through his holy love ! Let this be our motto."

The one ambition of her life was, at all times, the extension of the kingdom of God. She had now sent her daughters to work in schools, orphanages and other charitable institutions at Bordeaux, in Provence, Savoie, Auvergne and other French districts. Her almost continual round of visits to her convents and the difficulties of travelling a century ago, used to alarm her daughters ; and they often vainly tried to persuade their good mother to allow herself some interval of rest from time to time. "The Saints never rested," the Ven. Mother would answer. "They would never say 'We have worked enough for God.' They died in the hunger of their zeal for God's glory." When saying these last words she alluded specially to St. Francis-Xavier and St. Francis-Regis, her two favourite apostles among the Saints of the Society of Jesus. Another maxim was frequently heard from her lips : "When the grace of God works with us, we are enabled to do more than we expected."

That one constant aim, the promotion of God's interests, seemed to have made her indifferent to humiliation, disgrace and contradiction, either for herself personally or her spiritual daughters, provided it involved no offence to God. She, one day, wrote to the Superior of one of her convents who had been misunderstood and slandered : "When I hear that my daughters are praised, I say a *De Profundis* ; when I hear that they bear disgrace and contradictions well, I say a *Tc Deum*." — "Whatever be the result of our efforts," she wrote another time, "when I have prayed and have asked others to pray, I am no longer anxious." — On another occasion she said to one congratulating her on the success of some undertaking : "You trace our success to the natural means of which we have made use ; I know at what price I bought it, and the number of rosaries that have been offered for that intention."



She would have liked to give up the superiorship, and several times petitioned to be relieved of her office. But to this her daughters would never consent.

In one of her journeys to her convents, a reception was given her by persons who mistook her companion for the superioress. The poor Sister, in obedience to an imperative sign made to her by the Ven. Mother, had to be silent and accept the honours of the occasion. Her good Mother enjoyed the mistake, and congratulated herself afterwards on having had one quiet hour.

When she became the object of admiration on account of her sanctity, her intellectual gifts and the marvellous success achieved by her zeal and prudence, she was as indifferent as she had been when her small stature and modest demeanor had occasioned the mistake alluded to in the foregoing paragraph.

A lawyer who once had to discuss with her some intricate questions, went away saying : " That woman could have ruled our country, even through the Revolution ! " — A well-known Magistrate, M. d'Antoine, used to say " I have met but two persons in my life whose aspect impressed me irresistibly, Napoléon I and Madame Rivier."

Though her firmness and modesty had won the respect of revolutionary agents, while her all-compelling exhortations had moved hardened hearts to remorse, and the superhuman energy had conquered numberless difficulties, yet this remarkable woman was all gentleness and tenderness when dealing with the poor, her dear orphans and her spiritual daughters. There remained only a mother's heart steeped in the love of Christ's own heart.

The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord was one she understood best and loved to foster in those under her charge. " The Sacred Heart of Jesus will save our country,"

she was often heard to say when exhorting her community ; and in her Book of "Instructions Familières," that for the Feast of the Sacred Heart is perhaps the most touching.

The Ven. Mother, all through her life, endeavoured to discover the designs of Providence and conform to its ways. She knew how to wait for years without discouragement or impatience for what she used to call "the hour of God." And the miracles which, at times, answered her prayers ever found her in the same state of calm humility. She told her spiritual Director that she only wanted to be a faithful instrument in the hands of God. Finding that the cares of her office did not allow . . . to devote all the hours she would have wished to mental prayer, she used to try to make up for it by the practice of frequent ejaculations. One day, when she had accused herself of losing the presence of God, her Director asked her how long the distraction had lasted. "About a quarter of an hour," was the answer.

Once, when stopping at Marseilles she wished to go and pray at the foot of the well-known statue of Notre-Dame de la Garde, and ascended the steps which lead to it. Before leaving the spot after her prayers, she looked down a few moments on the grand panorama at her feet. But she quickly reproached herself for this innocent indulgence and accused herself of it as a fault.

Many of those who saw her at work or heard her energetic language, never suspected that almost every word she uttered required a painful effort. Among other infirmities, she also suffered all her life from an eczema on her legs which never left her a day or night without bodily discomfort, and often brought severe pain.

The subject the Ven. Mother loved to treat above all others, when addressing her spiritual daughters, the theme which moved her to use the most touching language, was the

love and imitation of Jesus-Christ. She tried at all times to inculcate a devotion to the spirit of Jesus-Christ. "My child, what would Our Lord have done or said under the same circumstance?" was a sentence frequently on her lips when giving a direction to the Sisters about some difficulty.

In her incomparable instruction on prayer and meditation, contained in the Book of the Rules, she would have her daughters strive to attain one sublime end — that of conforming themselves to Jesus-Christ, and Jesus-Christ crucified. The Sisters are to carry throughout the day's work the spirit and thoughts of their morning meditation. Their lives are thus to become a continued prayer, and the quarter of an hour devoted to the daily evening meditation is to be, as it were, a colloquy, or rest at Our Blessed Lord's feet, after working with Him all day.







## VIII.

### **The Venerable Mother's Death. — Spread of her Congregation.**

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THE Ven Foundress was now in her 78th year. Though she was prevented by dropsy in her legs from following the community routine, she would receive the Sisters and talk to them in her room. Whenever she was well enough to write, one of the last objects of her concerns was the revision of her Book of Familiar Instructions.

Even intense bodily pain could never deprive her of that supernatural energy and devotion to others which had been the characteristic features of her whole life. One day, when in bed, she heard a Sister say that a poor woman was asking for a blanket and there was none to give her. "Take her this one," said the charitable mother pointing to the blanket on her own bed.

She soon understood the gravity of her illness. For several months, till the end of her life, she was compelled to spend days and nights in an arm-chair. In the room, at the foot of the Crucifix, there was a statue of Our Lady in a small niche. "Our Lord," said the Ven. Mother, "permitted that this should be here to let me understand that I should place myself in spirit as a victim, at the foot of the Cross, next to Our Blessed Lady. With Our Lord's grace, I hope I shall be able to bear, till the end, all sufferings He may be pleased to send me.

She was told, one day, that a few of her Sisters who had lately been sent to open a school at Cosne, were enduring a life of great poverty and privation. The Ven. Mother replied quickly : " I think I should like Cosne as much as Paradise itself ! "

Madame Rivier had a particular devotion to the Mystery of the Purification. On the morning of the 2nd February, 1838, one of the Sisters, talking about the Feast of the day, wished to know why her good mother had that special devotion. " I could not very well explain," answered the saintly Foundress. " It makes me feel a great desire to offer myself as a victim to God the Father in union with Our Lord and in company with His Blessed Mother."

The following day, February 3rd, 1839, the Venerable Foundress went to her reward. She breathed her last at her accustomed post of labour, seated in front of her desk, almost in her usual attitude of work. She had, till the end, exhorted, directed and edified her now bereaved and orphaned Community.

In 1853, the cause of her Beatification was introduced at the Roman Court. Pius IX was the first who styled her " The Woman-Apostle." Leo XIII proclaimed her Venerable.

On one occasion, addressing the Sisters, the Venerable Mother had said : " My daughters will cross the seas one day...." In 1853, the prophetic words were first fulfilled at the time of the foundation of the Canadian missions. Since then, the Congregation of the Presentation of Our Lady has spread through the United States of America and the North-West Territories. There are also convents of the Order at Lausanne, in Switzerland ; at Exeter, England ; at Porto-Maurizio, in Italy ; at San Sebastian and other towns in Spain.

On May 23rd, 1909, a Papal Bull of Solemn Approbation

was granted, transferring the Congregation from Diocesan Authority to that of Rome, under a Cardinal Protector.

Madame Rivier's Daughters, now scattered throughout the world, have one ardent wish : it is that the Roman Tribunal should solemnly recognize the miraculous nature of the favours obtained through the intercession of their saintly Mother Foundress.

Let souls who, to-day, feel the same lofty aspirations, and burn with something of the zeal which consumed the life of Madame Rivier, strive generously, by the help of God's grace, which is never wanting, to follow their noble vocation. Let them walk in her footsteps, and thus glorify God and His Venerable Servant.

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**PRAYER FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF THE VENERABLE  
ANNE-MARIE RIVIER.**

**L**ORD Jesus, who from the midst of the terrors of the Revolution, didst raise Marie Rivier to teach Christ. is to little children, who didst inflame her heart with zeal for the faith and salvation of souls, and who through her didst found the Congregation of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, vouchsafe to bless and prosper that Congregation, to make it fruitful in thy Church, and preserve in it the spirit of humility and simplicity of its Venerable Foundress.

Make us all share in her heroic virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity ; in her humility, forbearance and prudence ; and inflame our hearts with the ardour of her zeal for God's glory and the salvation of souls.

Dear Jesus, also vouchsafe, we beseech Thee, to show new signs of the credit which Thy humble servant enjoys with Thee in Heaven, and hasten the day when we can render her a public tribute of our veneration and love. — Amen.

Our Lady of the Rosary, pray for us.

St. Joseph, " " "

St. Ann, " " "

Our Guardian Angels, " " "

St. John Francis Regis, " " "

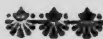
St. Aloysius Gonzaga, " " "

St. Stanislaus Kotska, " " "

St. Francis of Sales, " " "

St. Peter of Alcantara, " " "

St. Teresa, " " "





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